

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 CAIRO 01514 01 OF 02 141751Z
ACTION SS-25

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O 141410Z JAN 78 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM NIACT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV NIACT IMMEDIATE
SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 4255
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 01514

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EG IS
SUBJECT: MOOD IN CAIRO BLEAK ON EVE OF JERUSALEM POLIT-
- ICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING RECENT BEGIN STATEMENTS AND INCON-
CLUSIVE MILITARY COMMITTEE MEETING, EGYPTIANS FOCUSING
ON FORTHCOMING POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING WITH MIXTURE
OF EXASPERATION, DISILLUSIONMENT AND BITTERNESS. ISRAEL
SEEN AS BARGAINING AS IF SADAT HAD NEVER GONE TO JERU-
SALEM AND EGYPTIAN CONCESSIONS POCKETED WITH NOTHING
GIVEN IN RETURN. EVEN SUPPORTERS OF SADAT NOW BELIEVE
HIS GESTURE MAY HAVE BEEN NAIVE AND THAT RELIANCE ON U.S.
TO PRESSURE ISRAEL MISPLACED BECAUSE OF WHAT IS PER-
CEIVED AS WEAKNESS OF CARTER ADMINISTRATION. PUBLIC
ATTITUDE TOWARD VISITING ISRAELIS SOBER AND RESTRAINED.
COPTIC COMMUNITY FEARS FOR ITS FUTURE SHOULD SADAT FAIL.

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PAGE 02 CAIRO 01514 01 OF 02 141751Z

IN THIS BLEAK ATMOSPHERE WE ARE SEEKING TO LIFT FALTERING
SPIRITS BUT OUR COUNSEL IS ACCEPTED WITH LITTLE CON-
VICTION THAT SATISFACTORY OUTCOME LIKELY. END SUMMARY.

1. WITH CAIRO MILITARY COMMITTEE IN RECESS AFTER IN-
CONCLUSIVE TWO-DAY SESSION, EGYPTIAN ATTENTION NOW FOCUSED
ON JAN 16 POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING IN JERUSALEM.

SINCE ISMAILIA EGYPTIANS VIEWING NEGOTIATIONS WITH MORE REALISM. WIDE GAPS STILL SEPARATING TWO SIDES REVEALED DURING MILITARY COMMITTEE DISCUSSIONS HAVE, HOWEVER, CAUSED EXASPERATION, DISILLUSIONMENT AND BITTERNESS. ISRAELI PROPOSALS PRESENTED AT ISMAILIA AND IN MILITARY COMMITTEE SHOCKED EGYPTIAN OFFICIALDOM AND PUBLIC. AS SADAT HAS PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY PUT IT, BEGIN HAS NOT YET LEARNED THAT ISRAEL CAN HAVE PEACE OR LAND, BUT NOT BOTH. EGYPTIANS DISMISS SUGGESTION THAT BEGIN HAS COME A LONG WAY IN HIS THINKING AND TEND TO DISCOUNT HIS DOMESTIC OPPOSITION AS A CHARADE OR AN EXCUSE.

2. SENIOR EGYPTIAN MEMBERS OF DELEGATION TO JERUSALEM, E.G., FONMIN KAMEL AND MINSTATE BOUTROS GHALI, ARE WORRIED. THEIR WORRY IS A MIXTURE OF CONCERN ABOUT THEIR PHYSICAL SAFETY IN JERUSALEM AND OF HAVING TO TACKLE WHAT THEY REGARD AS INTRANSIGENT ISRAELI LEADERSHIP. THEY ARE CONVINCED THAT NOTHING WILL COME OF THE TALKS UNLESS USG TAKES AN ACTIVE ROLE AND IS PREPARED TO PRESS ISRAELIS TO MAKE FURTHER CONCESSIONS WITH REGARD TO SINAI SETTLEMENTS AND IN WEST BANK/GAZA. WITHOUT THIS THEY EXPECT THE WORST.

3. ALONG WITH THIS SENSE OF DESPONDENCY, KAMEL AND GHALI ARE ALSO FRUSTRATED. THEY BELIEVE SADAT HAS GIVEN TOO MUCH AWAY BEFORE GETTING ANYTHING MEANINGFUL IN RETURN,
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PAGE 03 CAIRO 01514 01 OF 02 141751Z

E.G., EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, THESE MAJOR CONCESSIONS AND ARE NOW TRYING TO START FROM THAT BASIS. EVEN VP MUBARAK HAS URGED SADAT NOT TO OFFER ANY MORE CONCESSIONS UNTIL HE GETS SOMETHING IN RETURN. MUBARAK TOLD ME YESTERDAY THAT SADAT AGREES HE MADE A MISTAKE IN TELLING BEGIN HE WOULD BE WILLING TO DO THESE THINGS. KAMEL AND GHALI ARE ALSO SLIGHTLY PIQUED BY SADAT'S JERUSALEM POST INTERVIEW 'T YOU SEE THAT YOU HAVE GOT EVERYTHING? (REFERRING TO NORMAL, PEACEFUL RELATIONS) AND NOW YOU ARE STARTING TO BARGAIN WITH ME ON MY LAND. NO* YOU HAVE LOST THE ESSENCE OF MY INITIATIVE THROUGH THIS LOGIC . . . "

4. PESSIMISM ABOUT U.S. ROLE. COMMONLY HELD VIEW AMONG SADAT'S CRITICS, AND INCREASINGLY AMONG SUPPORTERS, IS THAT SADAT MISCALCULATED ON TWO COUNTS. FIRST, IT WAS

NAIVE TO BELIEVE THAT ISRAELIS WOULD RESPOND IN KIND TO

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PAGE 01 CAIRO 01514 02 OF 02 142355Z
ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T SECTION 02 OF 02 CAIRO 1514

EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y-TEXT ADDED TO PARA 4.

PEACE OFFERS BECAUSE THEY WOULD PERCEIVE THEM AS ACTS
OF WEAKNESS. SECONDLY, SADAT HAS MISJUDGED WILLINGNESS
CARTER ADMINISTRATION IS SEEN AS WELL-MEANING, BUT WEAK
AND INDECISIVE BY MANY BOTH PRO- AND ANTI-U.S. OFFICIALS.
DESPITE FAVORABLE IMPACT OF SADAT'S INITIATIVES ON U.S.
PUBLIC OPINION, THEY FEAR ADMINISTRATION IS NOT STRONG
ENOUGH DOMESTICALLY TO GIVE SUBSTANCE TO STATED U.S.
POLICY AND CONFRONT ISRAEL AND ZIONIST LOBBY. LEFTIST
CRITICS SUCH AS HAYKAL AND FORMER AMB TO YUGOSLAVIA
MURAD GHALIB (WHO RESIGNED OVER JERUSALEM TRIP) ARE
RIDING HIGH. GHALIB TOLD POLCONS JAN 14 THAT MUCH AS
HE WOULD REGRET SADAT'S FAILURE, HE MORE CONVINCED THAN
EVER THAT HIS INITIAL JUDGEMENT WAS VALID. HE CLAIMED
THAT BRITISH, GERMANS AND YUGOSLAVS SHARE VIEW THAT
PRESIDENT CARTER UNABLE DELIVER ISRAEL; GIVEN ZIONIST
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PAGE 02 CAIRO 01514 02 OF 02 142355Z

INFLUENCE PERHAPS ONLY AN EISENHOWER COULD, GHALIB MAIN-
TAINED. FORMER FONMIN FAHMY TOLD AMBASSADOR TWO EVENINGS
AGO THAT HE WISHES SADAT WELL, BUT SCOFFED AT IDEA THAT

ANYTHING USEFUL WILL COME OUT OF JERUSALEM TALKS.

5. IN DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY, THERE IS PROFOUND SKEPTICISM FEW BELIEVE WE ARE PREPARED TO DO SO IN ANY MEANINGFUL MANNER. ARAB DIPLOMATS, INCLUDING THOSE FROM FRIENDLY WHEN JERUSALEM CONFERENCE FAILS. THEY BELIEVE HE WILL GO TO PEOPLES ASSEMBLY AND ACKNOWLEDGE FAILURE, BLAME IT ON ISRAELIS AND SUBMIT HIS RESIGNATION. (SADAT HIMSELF IS SPEAKING MORE FREQUENTLY OF RESIGNATION THESE DAYS.) GENERAL FEELING OF MODERATE ARAB DIPLOMATS IS THAT PEOPLES ASSEMBLY AND PUBLIC WILL REFUSE RESIGNATION, ALA NASSER, BUT THERE ARE DIVIDED VIEWS AS TO WHETHER SADAT WILL THEN AGREE TO CONTINUE OR INSIST ON RETIRING. THOSE WHO BELIEVE HE WILL INSIST ON RETIRING NOTE SADAT IS TIRED AND DISCOURAGED.

5. PUBLIC ATTITUDE TOWARD VISITING ISRAELIS ALSO MORE SOBER AND RESTRAINED. JOURNALISTS, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE ALL HOUSED ON SIXTH FLOOR OF SHEPHERDS HOTEL, WHICH IS GUARDED TWENTY-FOUR HOURS A DAY BY EGYPTIAN SECURITY. JOURNALISTS REQUIRED TO TELL EGYPTIAN SECURITY OFFICIALS WHERE THEY ARE GOING AND VISITORS TO SIXTH FLOOR ARE ASKED TO PRODUCE IDENTIFICATION WHICH IS DULY NOTED IN LEDGER. NEVERTHELESS, ISRAELI JOURNALISTS SAY EGYPTIANS CONTINUING BE FRIENDLY AND HELPFUL, BUT SPONTANEOUS GOOD CHEER THAT EXISTED DURING CAIRO CONFERENCE IS GONE.

6. COPTIC VIEWS. COPTIC BISHOP TOLD EMBOFF COPTIC COMMUNITY "VERY WORRIED" BECAUSE ISRAELIS HAVE GIVEN NO INDICATION THEY SERIOUSLY INTERESTED IN COMPREHENSIVE SECRET

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PAGE 03 CAIRO 01514 02 OF 02 142355Z

PEACE. SHOULD SADAT INITIATIVES FAIL, HE WILL FALL AND SUCCESSOR GOVERNMENT WILL, BISHOP FEARS, BE EXTREMIST FOR COPTS. ONLY U.S. CAN "PRESSURE" ISRAEL INTO NECESSARY CONCESSIONS AND IT MUST DO SO IN INTEREST OF REGION AND WORLD PEACE.

7. IN ALL OF THIS GLOOM, WE ARE SEEKING TO LIFT FALTERING SPIRITS. IN TALKS WITH SADAT, MUBARAK, KAMEL, GHALI, AND OTHERS, I HAVE REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZED THAT PATIENCE IS NEEDED. WE ARE AT THE BEGINNING, NOT THE END OF A NEGOTIATION. NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE DIFFICULT AND PROTRACTED, BUT THERE IS NO CAUSE AT THIS TIME FOR DESPAIR. EMBOFFS DOING LIKEWISE WITH THEIR EGYPTIAN CONTACTS. SUCH COUNSEL IS ACCEPTED WITH LITTLE CONVICTION THAT A SATISFACTORY OUTCOME LIKELY.

8. DESCRIBING HIS MOOD, ONE MEMBER EGYPTIAN DELEGATION TOLD EMBOFF TODAY, "I AM PRAYING TO GOD AND COUNTING ON

USG TO DO SOMETHING." THIS ENCAPSULES WIDESPREAD EGYPTIAN
ATTITUDES. EILTS

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